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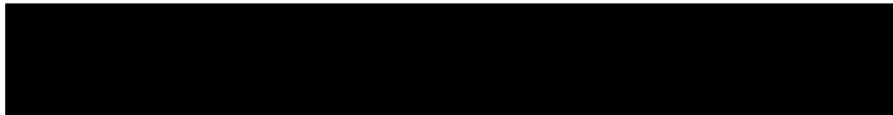
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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

18 March 1988



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INDIA'S STRATEGIC INTERESTS, DEFENSE STRATEGY,  
AND FOREIGN POLICY [REDACTED]

Summary

India defines its strategic interests, defense strategy, and foreign policy in regional terms. New Delhi considers the subcontinent as a strategic entity, with the neighboring countries of Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka forming India's natural defense perimeter. India's diplomatic and military policies seek to maintain a preponderance of power over these states, while limiting the superpower presence in the Indian Ocean. Although India sees Pakistan as its most immediate security threat, it considers China as potentially its most serious concern. India seeks recognition of its status as the region's dominant power and has been using its military power recently in ways to secure this recognition. [REDACTED]

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India's defense strategy, in our judgment, is focused on establishing two geographic buffer rings to protect the country from attack and deny outside powers footholds in South Asia. India seeks to maintain a preponderance of military power over an inner ring that includes Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. New Delhi believes these states dominate historic invasion routes and serve as barriers to Soviet and Chinese military pressure. ■■■

India also wants to establish security ties to an outer circle of countries in the Indian Ocean and along the littoral--such as Mauritius, Seychelles, Tanzania, Kenya, Malaysia, and Indonesia--where it fears outside powers, especially the superpowers, may try to gain major influence. India pursues an active program of ship visits and security training with these countries, maintains an interest in the affairs of their ethnic Indian communities, and seeks to build stronger commercial ties with them. India also encourages regional groupings, such as the Organization of African Unity, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as effective means of limiting superpower and ■■■ involvement along South Asia's perimeter. ■■■

Pakistan. India sees Pakistan, with which it has fought three major wars since 1947, as its most immediate security threat. The bulk of India's ground, air, and naval forces are stationed in the western part of the country, including about 250,000 troops along the Pakistani border. ■■■

Although India's military superiority over Pakistan is substantial, we believe weak Indian logistics and offensive doctrine and strong Pakistani defenses would prevent India from inflicting a decisive defeat on Islamabad before outside pressure to end hostilities becomes irresistible. Ceasefire lines would then be drawn inside

Pakistan, but with little strategic territory changing hands. We believe that the military balance, however, is tilting further against the Pakistanis ■■■

China. India considers China, which crushed India in the 1962 war, as its most serious security threat. Indian officials are quick to point out China's large military force structure, its nuclear arsenal, and its occupation of and claims to Indian territory to illustrate the nature of the Chinese challenge. India normally has about 120,000 troops stationed in the northeast near the Chinese frontier, another 35,000 near the border in Kashmir in the west, and about 45,000 deployable to the border areas in the case of imminent hostilities. Territorial disputes led to a border confrontation in 1987, and both sides maintain forward troop deployments despite a reduction in tension. We believe India most likely would be able to hold its own in another border conflict with China, although the Chinese could pick a poorly defended portion of the border for a quick strike and territorial gain. As in 1962, weather and terrain conditions likely would keep the war short and geographically confined. ■■■

Indian Ocean. In recent years, India's strategic horizons have grown to include the Indian Ocean and its littoral. Indian officials are concerned over the superpowers' naval presence in the area and that instability in many regional states invites the involvement of outside powers. The Indian Navy is by far the most powerful regional fleet and is beginning to acquire a nascent "blue water" capability with the recent lease of a Soviet nuclear-powered submarine (mainly for training purposes, we believe) and the purchase of Soviet long-range patrol aircraft. Nonetheless, we believe the Indian Navy's mission will remain primarily a coastal force--albeit a powerful one--into the next century and is a long way from being able to challenge any superpower naval deployments in the region. ■■■

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### Foreign Policy

India's basic foreign policy goals supplement its strategic interests and defense strategy. They include:

--Strengthening its preeminent position in the region by limiting the presence of outside powers and restricting opportunities for foreign interference--particularly by Pakistan--in internal Indian matters.

--Maintaining good relations with both superpowers. India wants to keep its traditionally close ties to the Soviet Union to retain access to the military hardware necessary to enforce its regional predominance and as a counterbalance to China. At the same time, India also believes that improved relations with the United States and other Western countries will help strengthen its regional position and, through commercial ties, satisfy its ultimate goal of self-sufficiency.

--Gaining international recognition as a world power. India believes its geographic size, large population, technical advancement, and strategic location should guarantee it an important role in international affairs.

India's foreign policy goals have not changed much under Rajiv Gandhi. Although he initially adopted a conciliatory approach to his Asian neighbors, Gandhi now mixes the carrot and the stick.

Gandhi is paying more attention lately to his security advisers than his foreign affairs experts, which may account for, or reflect, his shift in approach. Gandhi's main goals, however, consistently have been to extend India's claims to regional dominance and to develop more balance between India's relationships

with the Soviet Union and the United States. India seems prepared, as evidenced by its continuing Western high-technology purchases, to push ahead with better ties to the West.

Gandhi has grown increasingly aggressive over the last year in his use of military power in support of foreign policy goals. India pressed ahead with its largest ever military exercises--codenamed "Brass Tacks" and involving about 100,000 troops--near the Pakistani border in early 1987, knowing of Pakistani anxiety over the size and location of the maneuvers. The exercises precipitated a border confrontation involving a total of about 400,000 troops deployed on both sides, but tension eventually was eased following diplomatic overtures from Islamabad. Later last year, New Delhi deployed troops in its northeastern region to positions close to its border with China. These deployments enabled India to deal from a position of strength in underscoring its territorial claims to Arunachal Pradesh prior to another round of border talks and in confronting what it perceived as a Chinese encroachment on the border. Deployments and counterdeployments by both countries led to a tense border situation that continued well into autumn.

India's defense strategy and Gandhi's foreign policy are currently being played out in Sri Lanka. The Indo-Sri Lankan accord of last July has brought about 50,000 Indian troops to the island and a high investment by New Delhi in brokering a settlement between Tamil dissidents and the Sri Lankan Government. The intervention reinforces India's regional predominance and curbs what New Delhi saw as increasing foreign involvement in Sri Lanka's internal problems.

### Outlook

India's increasing willingness to demonstrate its military strength in support of foreign policy goals is likely to lead to greater regional tension. India's actions in Sri Lanka are raising concerns in Nepal and Bangladesh about their vulnerability to Indian pressure and

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military intervention. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Bangladesh officials already suspect India of encouraging the opposition to move against President Ershad, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The Pakistanis will believe themselves further prodded into an unequal arms race with the Indians, understanding that they are the primary potential target of New Delhi's buildup. Increasing military capabilities may encourage some Indian officials to increase New Delhi's involvement in the affairs of the Indian Ocean states. Although some Southeast Asian countries like Thailand, Malaysia, and Indonesia will increasingly suspect that India's naval buildup portends greater regional influence, they probably will remain more concerned about possible Soviet access to Indian ports and waters than any direct threat from New Delhi. [REDACTED]

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